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DE RUEHSO #0182/01 0841018  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 251018Z MAR 09  
FM AMCONSUL SAO PAULO  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9056  
INFO RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 0201  
RUEHRG/AMCONSUL RECIFE 4324  
RUEHRI/AMCONSUL RIO DE JANEIRO 9076  
RUEHBU/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES 3451  
RUEHAC/AMEMBASSY ASUNCION 3698  
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO 2872  
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 2698  
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ 4078  
RUEHME/AMEMBASSY MEXICO 0876

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 SAO PAULO 000182

SIPDIS  
SENSITIVE

STATE FOR WHA/BSC, BLAKENY VASQUEZ

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [SCUL](#) [SOCI](#) [PGOV](#) [INR](#) [KPAO](#) [BR](#)  
SUBJECT: OUTREACH TO AFRO-BRAZILIANS - TAKING OBAMA TO THE  
QUILOMBOS

REF: 08 Sao Paulo 119

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED

¶1. (U) Summary: Traditional Afro-Brazilian community (quilombo) leaders expressed admiration for President Obama and were pleased to hear about the U.S.-Brazil Joint Action Plan Against Racism (JAPR) during Poloff's February 10 visit to the Vale do Ribeira region of Sao Paulo State. Quilombos are communities comprised of the descendents of escaped slaves that are often economically disadvantaged. Quilombo leaders want to improve their communities' economic prospects, particularly through enhanced education, and the GOB has worked in recent years to improve services to these communities. Quilombos present excellent opportunities for outreach and deepening our bilateral work on the U.S.-Brazil Joint Action Plan Against Racism (JAPR). End Summary.

UP-CLOSE WITH THE QUILOMBOS

¶2. (U) In a February 10 visit to three Quilombos near the city of El Dorado in the Vale do Ribeira region of Sao Paulo State, (where the bulk of Sao Paulo quilombos are located), Poloff met with ITESP (Land Institute for the State of Sao Paulo) bureaucrats, local elected officials, and traditional quilombo leaders and residents. These included: ITESP Regional Coordinators Pedro Lima and Jose Renato Lisboa; El Dorado City Councilman and former quilombo community leader Jose Rodrigues da Silva; El Dorado City Council member Franciny Regineli Cirino Lobo Ferreira; El Dorado Mayoral representative Edson Ney Barbosa; and quilombo community leader Joao Vitorino Soares da Mota.

¶3. (U) Quilombos are traditional Afro-Brazilian communities originally founded by escaped slaves in remote areas. They hold communal title to their lands and survive mostly on subsistence farming and handicrafts. In Sao Paulo State, these communities are small, ranging in size from as little as one to as many as 98 families. ITESP grants quilombos legal recognition and works with the GOB to provide them with access to government assistance. Many quilombos still await official recognition, which would make them eligible for government support.

PRESIDENT AND JOINT ACTION PLAN ON RACISM ARE WELL RECEIVED

¶4. (U) Poloff discussed the recent election of President Obama with local representatives. They were universally pleased by his success, although several continued to express surprise that he had been elected. They were also generally unaware of the U.S.-Brazil

Joint Action Plan Against Racism (JAPR), but were happy to hear about it and expressed hope that it would translate into greater U.S. engagement in Brazil on topics concerning race.

#### VISITING THE QUILOMBOS

15. (U) Jose Rodrigues accompanied Poloff on a visit to the quilombos of Sao Pedro, Galvao and Ivaporunduva (where he once served as the Community Leader and continues to serve in a secondary role). He said that he and most of the quilombolas (members of quilombo communities) in the region appreciated the help they had received from the State including: training in animal, plant and fish husbandry; the construction of a guest house to promote tourism; an organic banana cooperative for the farmers; and an artisanal workshop for the women. In some communities Poloff visited, the State Secretariat of Housing had also provided bricks and other raw materials for basic housing as well as access to electricity and running water (in the form of a communal spigot). Rodrigues noted that his community is excited by ITESP's plans to construct a bridge over the nearby River Ribeira to connect the local quilombos of Sao Pedro, Galvao and Ivaporunduva to the main road.

#### SPECIALIZED EDUCATION AND THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

16. (U) The quilombo communities visited had an elementary and middle school that was tidy and well-supplied with text books, but lacked library books and other resource materials. In keeping with the March 2008 Joint Action Plan Against Racism between the U.S. and

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Brazil and its focus on education, Poloff donated Portuguese language books on U.S. History, U.S. Government, and African American artists to the school library. While the students had a computer room, administrators noted that due to "technical difficulties" the school is not connected to the Internet. (Comment: The community center at Ivaporunduva received a corporate donation of computers and reportedly has Internet access.)

17. (U) Soares da Mota remarked that the people in his community have asked for specialized education for quilombo students. He noted that teachers assigned to local schools come from various parts of Sao Paulo State and often have no understanding of quilombola history or traditions. He advocated hiring teachers from within the quilombos so that quilombola children can have role models and an understanding of their history. Students who wish to continue their education past middle school must attend the Brazilian equivalent of high school in nearby El Dorado. Rodrigues and Soares da Mota added that they had a number of college graduates among the younger quilombola generation, many of whom take advantage of online college classes to complete their degrees.

#### COMMENT

18. (SBU) Brazil's Afro-Brazilian quilombos are locked in a kind of cultural and political limbo. While many await official recognition to receive benefits, quilombo leaders struggle with the challenge of both trying to preserve Afro-Brazilian traditions and promoting development. Improving education is high on their agenda. The Brazilian state, to its credit, is making efforts to legally recognize more quilombos and to deliver services, but this is not a rapid process.

19. (SBU) Both the JAPR and President Obama's election offer us an opportunity to perform outreach to the quilombos, a key part of Brazil's overall Afro-Brazilian population. Quilombo residents admire Obama and would both appreciate and benefit from the delivery of educational materials on the U.S. A small investment of time and resources could yield solid benefits in terms of good will and in developing contacts in rural regions not normally targeted by our outreach efforts. End Comment.

STORY